

EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Nov. 27

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Luh says she's even beginning to think that the 45 percent figure isn't what this state needs. She's not alone.

From truckers to Unshackle Upstate, everyone wants to know what Thruway Authority officials are thinking, other than using the threat of a sky-high increase to ease the eventual blow of, say, a 35 percent increase. Who knows? The Cuomo administration hopes to raise \$90 million in additional revenue for the Thruway Authority. One theory is that it can then skip over to the bond market to help finance a \$5 billion Thruway bridge project over the Hudson River between Westchester and Rockland counties.

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The bad idea of using Thruway tolls to pay for the canal was most recently pointed out by State Sen. Patrick M. Gallivan, R-Elma. The Thruway and canal system were joined 20 years ago during the administration of the governor's father, Mario M. Cuomo, as part of a scheme to help balance the state's general fund.

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The ban, known as Proposal 2 and approved in a state referendum in 2006, amended the State Constitution to "prohibit all sex- and race-based preferences in public education, public employment, and public contracting."

The court's 8-to-7 decision focused not on admissions policies per se but on the fact that the process by which the ban was approved — the referendum leading to a constitutional amendment — would inevitably require people who wished to reverse it "to surmount more formidable obstacles than those faced by other groups to achieve their political objectives."

Writing for the majority, Judge R. Guy Cole Jr. argued that a black student seeking a race-conscious admissions policy would have to undertake the "long, expensive and arduous process" of amending the state constitution all over again. But students seeking to change other admissions policies — for example, to favor applicants whose relatives attended the school — could resort to a variety of readily available means, including lobbying the admissions committee or the university's leaders.

"The existence of such a comparative structural burden," Judge Cole wrote, "undermines the equal protection clause's guarantee that all citizens ought to have equal access to the tools of political change."

The result of the court's sound ruling is a level playing field, as the Constitution demands. But the issue may not be settled. The Ninth Circuit has upheld a California affirmative-action ban that was a model for Michigan's. With a conflict in the circuits on this issue, the Supreme Court may be persuaded it is ripe for review.

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The devastation that remains from Superstorm Sandy can't be overstated. Two weeks after Sandy slammed into the Northeast, more than 50,000 homes and businesses remain without power. Early estimates put the damage in three states at \$50 billion.

The magnitude of the crisis demands that Gov. Andrew Cuomo, his counterparts in New Jersey and Connecticut, and Congress focus on the task at hand — relieving the very real human suffering and doing all they can to help the region recover. Tragedy would be compounded if they were to turn the issue of federal aid into an occasion for haggling or ideological posturing.

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There is ample precedent for us to worry about just that.

In 2001, following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, then-Gov. George Pataki made an eye-popping \$54 billion request for federal aid. Mr. Pataki's request went far beyond what New York needed for that emergency. The governor larded on some \$20 billion for tax incentives to lure businesses to the state and pay for subways, light rail, roads and bridges statewide. A high-speed passenger rail service between Schenectady and Manhattan was on his list.

Even with the extraordinary sympathy for all New York City had endured, even with a fellow Republican in the White House, Washington balked at Mr. Pataki's opportunism, however well-intentioned it might have been for the benefit of his state.

Listen to how one observer put it:

"When he put (out) a plan for \$54 billion . and he had projects that were in no way connected to the recovery, they said, 'Here comes a local government that is looking to seize this situation for their own financial benefit,' and they recoiled."

That observer was a former U.S. secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Andrew Cuomo.

Now Mr. Cuomo is governor, with a bold request of his own: \$30 billion to cover the cost of Sandy. Not just 75 percent of the cost, as federal aid normally works. He wants it all covered.

If he's to make that case, the governor must remember his own political wisdom in 2001: no games. This is no time to slip pet projects onto the list, or tack on a little extra to make his 2013 budget easier. Washington has problems of its own.

As for Congress, this is not the time to get bogged down in another protracted debate over big government or the nation's debt, not when tens of thousands of Americans are suffering, many of them residents of a state already facing a deficit next year that is hardly in a position to handle this disaster on its own. Trying to score political points in such a crisis ought to be below even Washington's low bar.

If lawmakers really want to do something meaningful, they can start talking about how the nation will cope with what are expected to be more of these kinds of emergencies in the future. That starts, of course, with Republicans in particular acknowledging that a warming world, and human activity's contribution to it, is not some liberal myth, but the consensus of the vast majority of scientists. To ignore this reality in pursuit of wishful thinking is irresponsible.

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Congressional inquiries into the attack on the Libyan consulate that claimed four American lives in September call into question claims made by President Obama and the administration about the nature of the assault on the anniversary of 9-11.

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From the beginning, there appeared to be some confusion or miscommunication within the administration about whether the attack was a terrorist plot or a spontaneous demonstration similar to what had been happening in other Muslim countries in response to an online film denigrating Islam. The latter was the administration's position advanced by U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice on television five days after the attack in which Ambassador Chris Stevens and three others died.

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**Siegel: Fracking harms environment, planet's climate
Ventura County Star - Online**

11/26/2012

Ventura County Star

Sports

Re: David Quast's Nov. 18 guest column, "The case for hydraulic fracturing":

A tidal wave is about to sweep over our state. Oil companies are snapping up thousands of acres across central and Southern California. Armed with dangerous new techniques, the petroleum industry aims to exploit a vast reservoir of previously inaccessible shale oil — and the consequences for our air, water and public health could be devastating.

This oil will be extracted using hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, as the industry commonly calls it. Fracking is a rapidly evolving technique that involves blasting huge amounts of water, along with toxic chemicals, deep into the ground to break up rocks and extract oil and gas.

Many Californians don't realize we're facing a fracking boom and don't know much about the technology's risks.

But our nonprofit organization, the Center for Biological Diversity, has documented fracking in nine California counties, including Ventura.

Petroleum industry documents show growing interest in the approximately 14 billion barrels of shale oil in the Monterey Shale formation, which lies beneath some of the most beautiful wildlife habitat and most productive farmland in America.

Some claim that California's environmental laws will protect us. But state officials have admitted that they currently do not even track, let alone regulate, fracking. The state has even been criticized by the Environmental Protection Agency for doing too little to protect our underground water supplies from oil-industry pollution.

Under pressure from concerned lawmakers, the state Department of Conservation's oil and gas division has belatedly begun to develop fracking regulations. But the public has yet to see even a draft version of these rules. Meanwhile, state officials have little idea when or where fracking is occurring — or what chemicals are used in the process.

The oil industry often claims there's nothing to fear because fracking has been used for decades. But today's fracking is new and different, and as the practice has changed and expanded, so has damage to the environment. New techniques include the use of chemical concoctions called "slick water" that help generate the pressures needed to break apart rock.

The risks are well documented. The EPA, for example, recently confirmed fracking-related water pollution in Pavillion, Wyo. That's disturbing when you consider that fracking routinely employs dangerous chemicals like methanol and benzene.

About 25 percent of fracking chemicals could cause cancer, while many others harm the nervous, endocrine, immune and cardiovascular systems, according to scientists. A recent study from the Colorado School of Public Health found that fracking contributes to serious health problems in people living near fracked wells.

Fracking will increase air pollution. Our poor air quality already keeps far too many children home from school and adults home from work because of asthma and other respiratory ailments. Protecting the air we breathe and our children's

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health is urgent.

And fracking also threatens our planet's climate by releasing large quantities of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Fracking the billions of barrels of oil in the Monterey Shale will light the fuse on a carbon bomb that will shatter our state's efforts to fight global warming.

Other risks may be hidden by industry secrecy. Few knew, for example, that radioactive probes were used with fracking until one of these dangerous devices fell off a truck in Texas earlier this year. This radioactive probe wasn't found for almost a month.

California lawmakers must move quickly to address fracking. To protect our health and our future, this dangerous practice should be banned in California. Trashing our air, water and climate is not the right way to move our state forward.

Kassie Siegel is director of the Center for Biological Diversity's Climate Law Institute in San Francisco.,

GOSC writes:

Californians must also consider what increased production means in terms of limited resources and the current status of an O&G aging industry infrastructure.

There are numerous unanswered questions about the available science and safety that hydrogeologists and geologists must be vigilant in exploring to insure the safety of diminishing water sources and protection of the CA wilderness and agricultural areas.

First and foremost should be transparency in the industry's projected use of our fresh water resources which will surely be impacted by increased production...exacerbated by the proposed fracking process.

Californians should not be penalized by higher prices due to diminished availability caused by profit motivated energy giants.

Californians and their future should come first when it comes to anticipating our water needs.

And when these industries pack up to go to new areas to exploit, their production remains should be as little as possible.

bionox writes:

You drill a hole through geological strata, some of which hold water, some of which hold hydrocarbons. You attempt to shield and isolate the borehole from the adjacent strata with steel and concrete. You find a stratum that holds hydrocarbons and is amenable to fracking. You inject your proprietary cocktail (Halliburton's secret sauce, gotta love that!) under high enough pressure to crack and fragment the shale and release the hydrocarbons. You suck up the good stuff and leave the bad. You trust your engineering and Nature to retain the integrity of your borehole for an indefinite period. My questions are:

1. What is in your "cocktail"?
2. How much of it remains in the ground?
3. How do you prevent earth movement from compromising your well casing and shielding?
4. What are your liabilities if the fracking fluid finds its way to and subsequently contaminates an aquifer?

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5. How would you pay those liabilities?

6. How would you restore an aquifer?

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Tests, controversy, more testing
Casper Star-Tribune - Online

11/26/2012

Tests, controversy, more testing

2012-11-26T11:00:00Z 2012-11-26T09:10:18Z Tests, controversy, more testing

By ADAM VOGUE

Star-Tribune energy reporter

trib.com

The dispute over whether the oil and gas industry -- namely hydraulic fracturing -- contributed to water contamination near Pavillion has lasted years. Here's a look at how events unfolded:

*2005-2009: Some Pavillion-area residents worry that nearby drilling is harming their drinking water wells. Encana, the natural gas field's operator, claims the bad water is common to the area.

*Late 2009-early 2010: After getting complaints from some Pavillion area residents, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency tests 41 drinking water wells in the area.

*August 2010: The EPA recommends that several Pavillion-area residents with private water wells find other sources for water used in drinking and cooking, after testing shows compounds officials believe shouldn't be in the water.

*Summer 2010: The EPA drills two monitoring wells in the Encana Oil and Gas-owned Pavillion field in order to test the water and determine whether it had been polluted.

*March 2011: The Pavillion Working Group, a collection of state and local officials, private citizens and representatives from Encana, begin meeting to determine what information is needed to solve the dispute.

*November 2011: The EPA releases data from its round of water testing near Pavillion. The testing detected high levels of benzene, methane and other chemicals. Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said the chemicals may be linked to hydraulic fracturing.

*November 2011: Midland, Texas-based Legacy Reserves LP backs out of a deal to purchase wells in the Pavillion field, citing the federal investigation.

*December 2011: The EPA releases a draft report tentatively linking hydraulic fracturing to groundwater contamination near the Pavillion gas field.

*December 2011: Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead calls for a broader groundwater investigation of the area.

*January 2011: The EPA extends public comment on the draft report, which was originally set to expire in January.

*March 2012: Mead signs a bill which allocates \$750,000 to help residents affected by the water controversy. The state would later decide to use the money to construct cisterns.

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*March 2012: The EPA agrees to further testing of its two wells near Pavillion, to clarify questions about the first round of results. The agency agrees to bring in the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct the testing.

*April 2012: The USGS begins a second round of testing on the wells near Pavillion.

*June 2012: State oil and gas supervisor Tom Doll says some Pavillion-area residents were motivated by greed while speaking at an industry event in Canada. Doll resigned the next month.

*September 2012: The USGS releases data from the last round of testing with no analysis. The EPA and industry offer differing interpretations of the numbers, with EPA saying they're "generally consistent" with earlier results.

*October 2012: EPA officials announce another comment period delay, this time to January 2013, at a Pavillion Working Group meeting in Riverton. A long-awaited peer review is also pushed back, likely to January.

*October 2012: Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality Officials tell a small group of Pavillion-area residents that 14 months of air testing near the field showed no air quality violations. Residents expressed concern over the monitoring equipment's location and elevation.

Reach energy reporter Adam Voge at 307-266-0561, or at adam.voge@trib.com . Read his blog at <http://trib.com/news/opinion/blogs/boom> or follow him on Twitter @vogeCST .

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Renewables poised to thrive, despite Washington gridlock FierceEnergy

11/26/2012

In the wake of the presidential election, the energy industry is beginning to piece together the potential implications of a second Obama term on energy policy and standards, which could have big impacts on the future of electricity generation and grid operation in the United States.

In the wake of the presidential election, the energy industry is beginning to piece together the potential implications of a second Obama term on energy policy and standards.

While the coal and gas industry tend be wary of more clean energy reform (coal retirements are already gaining traction), the fact is that Obama is still faced with a Republican-dominated Congress likely unwilling to approve environmental regulations that could be seen as costly to businesses and ratepayers. And the President is still being haunted from the fallout of a \$535 million loan guarantee made to failed green power company Solyndra, which in the eyes of many damaged his credibility in handling renewable energy issues.

All these obstacles, coupled with the fact that energy policy typically pales in urgency when compared to tax reform, deficit and social issues, mean that Obama will likely have a tough time pushing through any of his "all of the above" energy legislation initiatives before exiting the White House in 2016.

It will certainly take some creative solutions and whole lot of political savvy, noted Alfred Zacher, author of *Presidential Power in Troubled Second Terms*.

Public wants renewables

But despite all this (and not to mention the dirt-cheap price of domestic natural gas), it's not a stretch to say that a majority of people want renewable energy to be part of the country's energy future. And individual utilities and companies have an opportunity to take renewable energy development into their own hands.

NREL predicts that commercially available renewable energy technologies, along with a more flexible grid, could provide up to 80 percent of U.S. power generation by 2050. _____

"Consumers, especially younger consumers these days, expect the business out there and all of us in the industry to figure out how to make sure we keep bringing more renewables into the mix," said Drew Murphy, Executive Vice President of Strategy and M&A at NRG, during the October RETECH conference.

This could all play into Obama's favor, and be used as fodder in making the case for Federal energy legislation.

Still, in a conversation with FierceEnergy, Zacher noted that the possibility of new energy regulation is "very dim." He did, however, suggest that a lack of policy won't undo renewable energy progress already being made across the country. Simulated models have shown that attaining significant levels of renewable generation in the U.S. is possible, albeit ambitious.

In June 2012, the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) released its "Renewable Electricity Futures Study", which was sponsored by the Department of Energy, and examined renewable energy and technical issues dealing with operation of

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the U.S. grid as a whole.

The report concluded that "a future U.S. electric system that is largely powered by renewables is possible," said Karlynn Cory, a senior energy analyst at NREL, presenting at RETECH.

More specifically, it predicted that commercially available renewable energy technologies, in partnership with a more flexible grid, could provide up to 80 percent of U.S. power generation in 2050 while meeting electricity demand in every U.S. region. An IEEE analysis of this report shows that this scenario requires 439 gigawatts of installed wind capacity by 2050. To date, the U.S. is only at about 50 gigawatts, so meeting the NREL model could mean building as many as 3000 wind turbines annually for the next 40 years, according to IEEE.

An ambitious goal

This is an ambitious goal, but utilities may have little choice in the matter, as new air toxic standards from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency continue to make new coal generation difficult. Utilities have four years to comply with the rules, which have raised concerns about the negative impact on electric reliability and cost. In addition, the Washington Post notes that the EPA is currently reviewing hydraulic fracturing impacts and could bring new proposed rules sometime next year.

All in all, the Obama Administration alone does not have the force to produce a deluge of renewable energy mandates down on the industry. His re-election does not signal a surefire sea change of energy policy. But either way, the next four years are going to see more and more businesses and utilities enter into the space, as pressure builds to continue providing energy that is both affordable and reliable.

"Any energy company that is going to be successful growing and returning money to its shareholders and investors is going to have a significant renewable component to its business," NRG's Murphy said.

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Rockies Today, Nov. 26
Missoula Independent - Online

11/26/2012

Posted by Mountain West News on Mon, Nov 26, 2012 at 10:16 AM

Top news links, courtesy of Mountain West News.

Today, the U.S. Senate will vote on, and likely pass, Montana U.S. Sen. Jon Tester's "Sportsmen's Act of 2012," a grab bag of bills dealing with hunting, fishing, conservation and public access measures, but environmental groups said there are problems with some of the measures, including one that would preclude the EPA from banning the use of lead in ammunition.

Washington Post; Nov. 25

North Dakota is second to only Texas in U.S. oil production, and with more oil being pulled out of the Bakken formation in Montana as well, railroads are hauling more oil to Washington state, where refiners are ramping up capacity.

Seattle Times; Nov. 26

Yates Construction, a Mississippi-based company, has announced plans to build a factory in Bynum to make components needed by oilsands operators in Alberta, giving Montana a second manufacturing facility tied to oilsands production.

Great Falls Tribune; Nov. 24

The residents of Longmont voted 60 to 40 percent to impose a ban on the drilling method known as hydraulic fracturing within the Colorado town's limits, putting at the forefront of a state and national dispute on the practice.

New York Times; Nov. 25

A new study released last Thursday indicates that the world's forests are exceptionally vulnerable to drought, and that if climate change models prove to be true, those forest lands will be replaced by grasslands.

New York Times; Nov. 23

Last week, the Bureau of Land Management released a final record of decision for the East Converse, Highland Loop Road and Spearhead Ranch exploratory areas located in portions of Wyoming's Converse and Niobrara counties, which could result in as many as 444 new oil and gas wells in those areas.

Casper Star-Tribune; Nov. 26

In what is being categorized as a first, elk hunters shot and killed a charging grizzly bear in Grand Teton National Park on Thanksgiving morning.

Jackson Hole Daily; Nov. 24

At this point in federal budget negotiations, the National Park Service has three options, and none are particularly good, and in Wyoming, the gateway communities to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks, are concerned about the

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fiscal fallout about all of those options.

Casper Star-Tribune; Nov. 26

Mountain West News is a project of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West at The University of Montana. It provides a daily snapshot of news and opinion in the Rocky Mountain region of North America, giving the changing mountain West a tool to understand itself and a platform for the exchange of ideas.

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Pennsylvania's Top Environmental Regulator Champions Drilling Industry at Shale Conference DeSmogBlog

11/26/2012

When Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Michael Krancer stepped to the mic at a shale oil and gas conference earlier this month, he offered one of his most candid descriptions to date of how he sees his mission as a regulator. His job, he said, is to protect the state not from the potential misdeeds of drillers but from those of the EPA.

"EPA has completely lost its concept of the rule of law," Mr. Krancer charged, adding that he would remain watchful against any effort by the federal government to usurp state authority over hydraulic fracturing.

It was a small window into the mind of the top environmental regulator in a state now famous as ground zero of the current drilling boom, where the shale industry has enjoyed a virtually unprecedented bonanza.

Mr. Krancer described how foolhardy he thought it was to assume that the industry needed policing.

"We've been doing this safely in the United States for years and years and years," he said with regards to hydraulic fracturing (fracking).

Along these lines, he dared his listeners to walk up to any American rigworker and to look that worker in the eye and tell say to his or her face that they shouldn't be trusted to do their job safely.

"Actually, I don't recommend that you do take that challenge," he added, to knowing chuckles from the audience of shale gas industry representatives.

Mr. Krancer has come under heavy fire lately for the way his department has handled water testing when groundwater contamination from drilling and fracking was suspected.

During a question-and-answer session following his speech, Mr. Krancer was pressed repeatedly to explain why many test results were never released to homeowners.

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Describing it as a “manufactured issue” he went on the offensive against a state representative who had called for a criminal investigation into the DEP’s conduct.

“Frankly, that Representative doesn’t have the faintest idea what he’s talking about,” Mr. Krancer charged.

Mr. Krancer became increasingly combative as members of the press continued to question him about water testing results.

“Do your homework, and then come ask me an intelligent question,” Mr. Krancer shot back when award-winning Pittsburgh Post Gazette reporter Don Hopey asked about way his department chooses what to test for when contamination from drilling or fracking is suspected. (To his credit, Mr. Hopey did in fact seem to have done his homework, having in hand a thick stack of hard-copy documents covered in notes – including what appeared to be the very documents Mr. Krancer alleged the journalist had ignored.)

Krancer’s responses became vaguely threatening as the questions continued.

“I don’t comment on requests to investigate -- I could make a couple of requests to investigate myself but I probably shouldn’t or won’t do that,” Mr. Krancer said when a third reporter asked about the potential criminal investigations into the DEP’s handling of water test results.

Although his hostility to the press was palpable at times, he was far warmer when speaking to the energy industry.

“What I see is the making of an American energy super-power, right here in Pennsylvania,” he enthused, praising the industry for producing domestic energy that he said meant energy security for the United States and a major boon for the economy.

This closeness began long before this month’s conference. When Krancer joined Governor Tom Corbett’s administration, one of his first acts was to issue a policy requiring his personal approval for all Marcellus shale-related enforcement actions. After the memo describing the policy was leaked, governance watchdogs cried foul over the potential for political interference in law enforcement decisions and Krancer backed down. But the message to field agents had been sent.

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Indeed, enforcement has fallen by the wayside under Krancer's watch.

"More than 9 out of every 10 violations by Marcellus Shale gas drilling companies resulted in no fines from DEP," a report by the environmental group Clean Water Action concluded, based on a review of enforcement statistics from 2011.

"In fact, a larger percent of violations are going unpunished now than in any of the past 10 years," another report, by Earthworks' Oil and Gas Accountability Project, found after reviewing enforcement actions by the DEP up to April 2012. That report also found that even though drilling had slowed slightly in the state as natural gas prices plunged, the number of environmental violations by drillers has remained high.

As he spoke to drillers at the conference, Mr. Krancer was enthused about what he termed a "juggernaut of jobs" that could come from drilling in Pennsylvania. But in his enthusiasm, he seemed prone to an exaggerated take on the industry's potential.

In areas where the industry itself has scaled back on some of its overblown rhetoric, Mr. Krancer has gone in the opposite direction.

A few years ago, some in the oil and gas industry projected that one hundred years worth of natural gas could be produced from the Marcellus shale alone. But these early hopes have not been borne out. Last year, the USGS downgraded its estimates for the Marcellus region, and the EIA followed, slashing its projections for the Marcellus by eighty percent in January.

These revisions cast claims of a century-long supply into grave doubt. Undeterred, Michael Krancer went even a step further at the DUG East conference, telling those assembled that the region could supply "hundreds of years" of gas – far higher than the industry has ever claimed.

Krancer also predicted that drilling could create 20 million jobs – a stunning claim to make about an industry which the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates currently employs less than 200,000 workers.

In fact, Krancer's 20-million-jobs estimate reflects 18.4 million more jobs than the (often-debunked) claim by America's Natural Gas Alliance that shale drilling could create 1.6 million jobs nationwide – by 2035.

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There was another, perhaps even more telling, statistic that came from Krancer's speech at DUG East.

It was a full 8 minutes into his speech before Mr. Krancer first mentioned the environment. When he did so, it was to assure the assembled drillers that he was aware of their commitment to safety and their "environmental sensitivity."

But many in the state are not convinced that the industry's track record in the state justifies this degree of confidence.

"There are currently 12 environmental violations per day on average, at Marcellus Shale gas drilling well pads and associated infrastructure in Pennsylvania," Iris Marie Bloom, director of the Pennsylvania-based environmental group Protecting Our Waters, told NPR earlier this year.

As questions about Krancer's handling of environmental issues kept mounting during the question-and-answer session at the conference, it became clear that the secretary was among friends that day.

"Oh god, here we go," Talisman Energy's Dave Mitchell said quietly to a colleague when reporter Don Hopey, documents in hand, pushed Krancer for answers about the water contamination tests. "I'm gonna ask the next question."

Mitchell took the mic and tossed Krancer a soft-ball question about gas prices, directing attention away from environmental problems and away from Krancer's own record.

It was a gesture that spoke volumes.

As much as Secretary Krancer looks out for the shale drilling industry, it seems that, in some ways the industry looks out for him too.

Tags:

DUG East

Michael Krancer

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Developing Unconventionals East

shale gas

fracking

Water Contamination

Don Hopey

investigative reporting

talisman energy

pennsylvania

Tom Corbett

Marcellus Shale basin

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**Gas drilling presents Obama with historic choices
Farmington Daily Times - Online**

11/26/2012

Staff Writer

Updated:

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President faces decisions on fracking, LNG

By Kevin Begos

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) Energy companies, environmental groups, and even Hollywood stars are watching to see what decisions President Barack Obama makes about regulating or promoting natural gas drilling.

The stakes are huge. Business leaders don't want government regulations to slow the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars of clean, cheap domestic energy over the next few decades. Environmental groups see that same tide as a potential threat, not just to air and water, but to renewable energy. And on a strategic level, diplomats envision a future when natural gas helps make the U.S. less beholden to imports.

Some say the unexpected drilling boom presents historic options and risks for the Obama administration.

"It's a tough choice. The president is in a real bind," said Charles Ebinger, director of the energy security initiative at the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit. "I think the question is what does he want his legacy to be?"

Ebinger said that if Obama fully embraced the boom in gas drilling the nation could see "incredible" job gains that could lead to "a re-industrialization of America." Possibilities like that are tempting to any president, and perhaps even more so in the current economy.

"But really embracing this stuff is going to bring him squarely in conflict with some of his environmental supporters. It's not without some possible peril,

particularly if he gets to be seen too cozy with the oil and gas folks," Ebinger said.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, has made it possible to tap into deep reserves of oil and gas but has also raised concerns about pollution. Large volumes of water, along with sand and hazardous chemicals, are injected underground to break rock apart and free the oil and gas.

Environmental groups and some scientists say there hasn't been enough research on water and air pollution issues. The industry and many federal and state officials say the practice is safe when done properly, and that many rules on air pollution and disclosure of the chemicals used in fracking are being strengthened.

The Sierra Club is already trying to slow the gas rush, which began in Texas and has expanded to Pennsylvania, Colorado and other states. It's started a nationwide "Beyond Natural Gas" campaign to push for more regulation on an

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industry it describes as "Dirty, Dangerous and Run Amok."

"We need to avoid replacing one set of problems with a new but very different set of problems," said Michael Brune, the Sierra Club's executive director, referring to coal and natural gas. Investing in green energy makes more economic and environmental sense, he said.

The Sierra Club knows natural gas will be a part of the nation's energy future. "How much a part is a big fight right now," Brune said.

Such arguments have resonated with many environmental groups, and with actors and musicians who are lending their star power to anti-drilling efforts.

The Hollywood film *Promised Land* is scheduled for release in December, starring Matt Damon, with a story line about drilling from best-selling novelist Dave Eggers. But even before its release, critics pounced on the fact that some financing for the project came from a company in the United Arab Emirates a country that stands to lose money if the U.S. gets more of its energy needs at home.

Brune agreed that "you have to acknowledge that there are benefits to home-grown energy."

Critics say many states haven't been tough enough on the industry, which has objected to the idea of national drilling regulations. Some state officials oppose such proposals, too.

"Yes, we are concerned," said Patrick Henderson, energy executive for Pa. Gov. Tom Corbett. "Upwards of 10 federal agencies are seeking to put their proverbial nose under the tent with regard to oil and gas development." He added that federal intrusion "is a surefire way to impede job growth. We'll be vigilant of proposed federal rulemakings."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is conducting one major national review of drilling and potential drinking water impacts, but it won't be finished until 2014.

Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute, which lobbies for the industry in Washington, is hoping Obama's campaign rhetoric doesn't change.

"He has evolved on the oil and the gas issue, and today, he gives it a full-throated endorsement in terms of the need to produce it to create jobs, get our economy back on track," Gerard said in a postelection conference call.

Most experts agree that Obama faces four big choices about the gas boom: whether to back nationwide EPA rules; whether to keep pressuring coal-fired power plants to reduce emissions (which benefits gas as an alternative fuel); whether to allow large-scale exports of liquefied natural gas; and whether to support a national push to use compressed gas in commercial vehicles.

One expert in Texas predicted that Obama won't go to extremes.

"I don't think the administration will do anything to halt development," said Kenneth Medlock III, a professor at Rice University's Center for Energy Studies in Houston, adding that there will be "some attempts" to move regulations into federal hands.

Medlock expects Obama to keep the pressure on the coal industry, but go slowly on the natural gas export issue. The industry says exports have the potential to be highly profitable, but some members of Congress fear exports will just drive up domestic prices, depriving consumers and other industries of the benefits of cheap natural gas.

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Others see an opportunity for the president to stake out a middle ground.

"A lot of the industry guys are pretty shaken by the anti-fracking movement," said Michael Shellenberger, president of the Breakthrough Institute, an Oakland nonprofit that promotes new ways to address environmental issues. "That might make them a bit more open to regulatory oversight."

Shellenberger said natural gas could also be a "big opportunity" for Obama as part of a broader campaign to address greenhouse gas emissions.

Ebinger agreed, saying that "if we really pushed tax credits to get diesel out of long-distance trucks" that could lead to massive carbon dioxide reductions. But at some point, Obama will have to make tough decisions. "I don't think the president can punt this one," he said.

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**Gas drilling presents Obama with historic choices
Four Corners Business Journal - Online**

11/26/2012

Click photo to enlarge

A drilling rig is pictured near Calumet, Okla. in July.

President faces decisions on fracking, LNG

The Associated Press

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The stakes are huge. Business leaders don't want government regulations to slow the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars of clean, cheap domestic energy over the next few decades. Environmental groups see that same tide as a potential threat, not just to air and water, but to renewable energy. And on a strategic level, diplomats envision a future when natural gas helps make the U.S. less beholden to imports.

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Whatever Obama does, "it will definitely drive a bunch of people crazy" in the environmental community, Shellenberger said.